



# Airplane Crashes in the Rincon Mountain District of Saguaro National Park\*

## Introduction

Since 1942 six known aircraft have crashed in the Rincon Mountain District of Saguaro National Park (SNP), a seventh airplane exploded high above the park. Twenty nine people lost their lives in the accidents; there were no survivors.

Five of the seven crashes were of military aircraft. The most recent crash was in August of 1984. Even though the airplanes all crashed high in the mountains in rugged terrain most of the planes' wreckage has been salvaged.

## Description

*North American AT-6 Texan/Harvard.* The first aircraft to crash in the park was a North American AT-6 Texan, also known as a Harvard, a single engine U.S. Army Air Force advanced trainer. The incident occurred on December 28, 1942. The single crew member, an exchange officer from the British Royal Air Force, was killed.

*Consolidated B-24H Liberator.* This U.S. Army Air Force heavy bomber, with a crew of nine, crashed on July 30, 1943. There were no survivors. The aircraft was salvaged in the spring of 1960. B-24s were used in all theaters of WWII by U.S. and Allied air forces.

*North American B-25D Mitchell.* North American B-25D Mitchell, a U.S. Army Air Force medium bomber, crashed January 20, 1945. The crew of five perished in the crash. The aircraft left Kelly Field, TX, on a routine navigation training mission. The aircraft flew into the mountains during snow and rain squalls while making an approach to Tucson. The B-25 was used extensively throughout WWII. An early version of the B-25 was used doing the daring Doolittle Raid on Japan, April 18, 1942.

*Cessna UC-78B Bobcat.* On November 28, 1944 an AT-17/UC-78B Bobcat crashed in the park while on a flight from Pecos Army Air Field, TX. The plane was flying through a rainstorm with icing conditions at the time of the crash. The Cessna Bobcat was a dual engine U.S. Army Air Corps light transport aircraft. All three crewmembers perished in the crash.



A North American AT-6 Texan similar to the one shown in the above photograph was the first aircraft to crash in Saguaro National Park on December 28, 1942.

The Pima Air and Space Museum, in Tucson, salvaged the engines and remains of the fuselage in 1979 to reconstruct the aircraft, which is now part of the museum collection.



Consolidated B-24H Liberator. A plane similar to the one in this photograph crashed at RMD in 1943, there were no survivors.



North American B-25D Mitchell. A plane similar to the one in this photograph crashed at RMD in 1945 while flying through rain and snow squalls, there were no survivors.

## Cultural Resource Brief

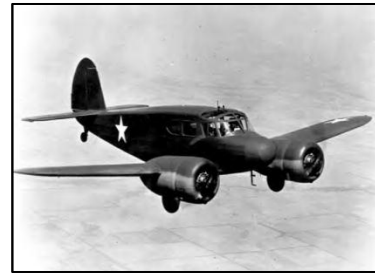


A Boeing B-47 Stratojet similar to the one in this photograph was observed to explode high over Spud Rock on December 3, 1953.

*Boeing B-47 Stratojet.* The Boeing B-47 Stratojet was a long range six-engine turbojet-powered strategic bomber. On December 3, 1953 a Boeing B-47 was observed to explode high over Spud Rock and crashed in the Reddington Pass area. All four crew members were killed in the explosion. The B-47 was refueling with a KC-97 tanker when the tanker's boom operator observed that two of the B-47's engines were on fire. The two planes immediately separated shortly after which the B-47 exploded. While no wreckage has yet to be found in the park, some debris may have fallen within the park.

*Piper PA-23 Apache.* On November 9, 1962, a Piper PA-23 Apache (light, twin engine passenger plane) crashed within SNP, killing all three on board. The circumstances under which the plane crashed were not recorded.

*Cessna 310.* The most recent airplane crash within SNP occurred on August 29, 1984. The plane was a Cessna 310, a light twin-engine aircraft with four persons aboard. The plane had flown into the side of the mountain under full power, probably during a low level night flight in a thunderstorm. The aircraft exploded on impact killing everyone on board. DEA records revealed that the plane had been leased to people with reported drug smuggling connections and there was potentially \$1.5 million on board the aircraft. A bag with moldy currency was recovered from the site; evidence at the site indicated that an undetermined amount of additional currency had been burned in the resulting fire. The aircraft insurer paid for the removal of the Cessna in 1998.



An AT-17/UC-78B Bobcat similar to the one in the above photograph crashed in SNP while on a flight from Pecos, TX., on November 28, 1944.



A Piper PA-23 Apache similar to the one in the above photograph crashed in SNP on November 9, 1962.



The most recent airplane crash within SNP was by a Cessna 310, similar to the one pictured above, on August 29, 1984.

\*Most of the material used in this resource brief came from Lawrence Tagg files, extracted material from which was used in the report: A History of the Structures and Artifacts of Saguaro national Park by Bruce "Chuck" Perger, 2008 MS on file at Saguaro National Park.

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